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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
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(Please on receipt)

SUBJECT: "Reclaiming Old Leather" ... Information from the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture

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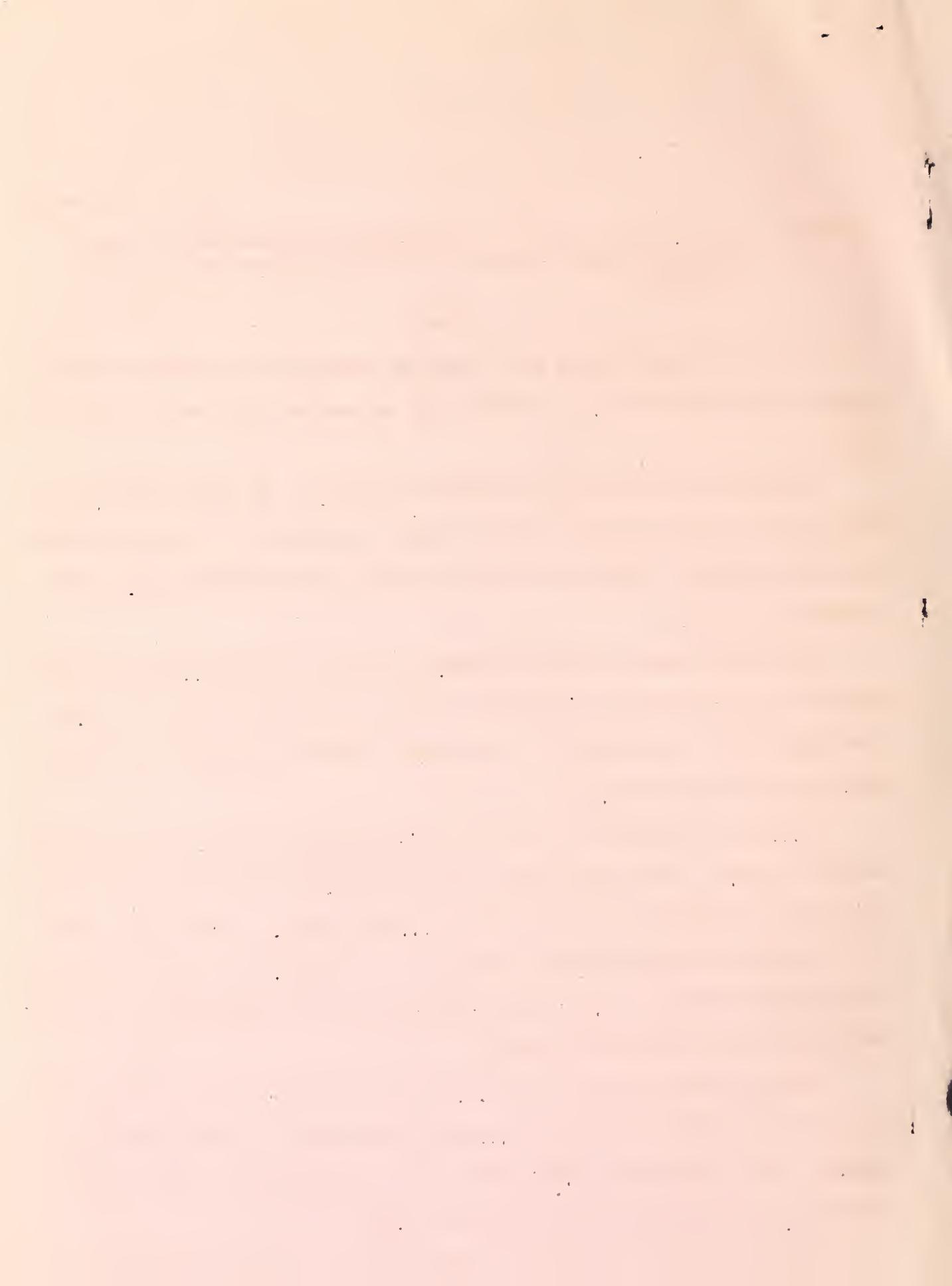
Dad's old leather jacket may furnish the "makings" of a sturdy sleeveless jacket and helmet for Junior. And there may be material for a pair of mittens as well.

Maybe you've never tried to reclaim worn leather. It isn't difficult. In fact...you may find it quite easy--say clothing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. And in these days when new leather's hard to get...it is certainly worthwhile.

Let's take a look at Dad's old jacket. No question about it...the jacket--like most worn leather goods--is badly soiled, and probably out in the elbows. Faded too. Maybe the other side looks better. Leather can often be turned--you know--just the same as cloth.

Well...the first job is to get the leather clean. If it were not so badly soiled and faded...you could clean it with saddle soap. Smooth leathers respond very nicely to saddle soap. But in this case...it won't do. You'll find mild soap suds are more effective than anything else you can use. So wash the leather with luke warm mild soap suds. What you want to do is get the dirt out and take off the old polish and surface finish.

When the surface finish is removed...the leather will take the dye. If you can't get the finish off with the suds...try scrubbing the leather with washing powder. That should do the work. With a little experimentation you'll soon be able to tell whether or not the finish is off.



Now for the dye. Different kinds of leathers--whether smooth or suede--take different kinds of dye. You'll want to check on that. Be sure you get the right kind. Maybe you'll want some advice. Ask about dyes in a leather shop or in a shoe findings shop.

When you have the right dye for your leather....follow the directions that come with the bottle exactly. You may need to put on three or four coats to get an even color. When the color suits you....finish suede leather with dressing of the same color -- smooth leather may look better if given a coat of renewer. These finishes give the permanence and soft finish you want.

Now before you make a helmet or mittens...be sure you have a pattern that fits. You can't sew up leather things and then find that you need to let the seams out. Once the machine has stitched through the leather...the holes are there to stay.

Notice I say machine stitched. Yes...you can sew soft leathers such as those in jackets--on your machine just as you do fabrics. Except for one thing: Use a stronger needle and lengthen the stitch on your machine. Then the sewing won't weaken the leather any more than necessary.

Another warning. You may find that the feed dog on the machine is scuffing the leather as you sew it. Guard against this by putting paper on the underside as you sew. Then you can pull the paper off later.

Finish the leather sewing with a good press. But don't use a hot iron. You can press seams and folds in a leather garment simply by pounding them lightly with a hammer. Or you can use a warm iron with paper next to the leather.

